

## SERMON LENT 5: 20/3/2026: GEOFF CHADWICK

### WILL THESE BONE LIVE?

#### Ezekiel 37.1-14

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.' <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' <sup>10</sup> I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. <sup>11</sup> Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.'

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There's a saying that if you are going to bury something you should make sure it is dead first.

If not, it has a habit of resurfacing!

This can be used as a metaphor for all sorts of things.

- Unresolved family issues that keep resurfacing.
- Unresolved church issues that keep resurfacing.
- Football teams making a great comeback at the last minute.
- Even removing weeds from the garden!

Today's reading from Ezekiel is a delightful example of this metaphor.

But first a little context.

Ezekiel was active at the time of the Babylonian Exile. You may recall that in 586BCE the Hebrew nations were plundered and defeated by the Babylonians (Chaldeans). The

Babylonian method of conquest was to remove the majority of people from their homeland and place them elsewhere – in this case Babylon (which was located in modern day Iraq).

The purpose was to break a nation's identity and to generate despondency. That way, it was hoped, the defeated would be dead and not rise up again.

So, the Hebrews found themselves heading towards despondency after 70 years in exile.

(586-538 BCE). Yet, paradoxically, this period became one of the most creative times for them. The people refused to let their identity die! Without the exile we would not have much of the Old Testament as we have it today; and without the exile the nation would not have implemented a number of social reforms.

Rather than burying the nation's identity, the exile motivated the scribes to write a record of the nation's history and beliefs. They began to compile oral tradition, and other dispersed documents into what we now call the scriptures. Not all of our current texts, but a fair proportion of it none-the-less. For example, the books of:

- Ezikiel,
- Lamentations,
- 1&2 Kings,
- Isa 40-55,
- Portions of Jeremiah,
- And much of Josua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Genesis and the Torah

were edited and compiled at that time.

The people feared the loss of story and identity. So they got to work writing everything down!

What's also interesting is that they wove their sources into a grand narrative that reflected the exilic situation that they were in.

In particular, the story of Moses was crafted as a parallel to their own exile. “Remember this” they are saying:

*“Moses too was in exile and finally reached the Promised land.”*

Now to today’s reading.

Ezekiel is prophesising about “dry bones”. He is speaking directly into the despondency and lost hope of the exiles. God asks the question:

*<sup>3</sup> ... ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’*  
(Ezk 37:3, NRSV)

Can these dry bones live? Is it possible for these despondent, hope-less exiles to regain their life?

And so we get the magnificent dramatic vision:

*<sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord .’* (Ezk 37:4-5, NRSV)

Did it happen? Did these “dried up old exiles find new life?”

Well yes it did, in the most unusual of ways.

In 539 BCE king Cyrus of Persia (modern day Iran) marched on the Babylonians and defeated them. Soon afterward, Cyrus in his wisdom allowed the exiles to return to their homeland. Here’s what it says in 2 Chronicles:

*22 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict:  
23 "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up."* (Chr 36:22-23, NRSV)

(Spoiler alert!) It's a bit like the ending to the movie *Jurassic Park*, where just as our heroes are about to get devoured by Raptors, a Tyrannosaurus Rex unexpectedly attacks the Raptors, and our heroes are free to escape!

Freedom has come via an unexpected outside source! The tyrant becomes the saviour!

Are you feeling like dried up bones at the moment? Does the Spirit of Life seem absent? Are you asking yourself: *Can these bones live?*

I want to be careful here, because I don't believe that everything old should be revived. There are some things which should remain dead. I will give you an example.

In a small country town, I was once asked by a young mum to baptise her baby.

*Sure*, I said. *I've got a baptism coming up soon with the x family. Why don't we make it a double and have a big celebration.*

The young mum paused, thought for a while and said:

*"We hate that family".*

Taken aback I offered to find a good way forward.

Cutting a long story short, both families came to the church on the same occasion to have their babies baptised together. Why?

Well I uncovered a deep seated rift between great-grandparents from 50 years earlier when there had been a dispute over a boundary marker.

*"It was time to bury this,"* I told them, and the new generations agreed!

There is one Lord, one Faith, one baptism!

Now getting back to our dry bones. Are we really dead, or is there life in us still?

Maybe there will be an unexpected Cyrus who will bring us life in the most unexpected of ways!

I guess the challenge is to look for life. To ask ourselves, "What gives us life?"

Perhaps this life-giving ingredient is an outsider. After all Cyrus was a foreigner.

Maybe it's being faithful; remembering to record our stories and our histories.

Or maybe it realising we have haven't yet recognised our saviour?

Or as a friend once said to me in my youth:

*"Expect it when you least expect it!"*

The Lord be with you.